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Circular Letter #103.

Jan. 14, 1929

Report on themes graded separately
for mechanics and content. (See
Circular Letter No. 56.)

GOVERNMENT OF PORTO RICO
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
SAN JUAN

ADDRESS ALL OFFICIAL
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE
COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION
SAN JUAN, P. R.

January 14, 1929.

Circular Letter No. 103.

Subject: REPORT ON THEMES GRADED SEPARATELY FOR
MECHANICS AND CONTENT. (See Circular Letter No. 56.)

Supervisors of Schools,
Principals of High Schools, and
High School Teachers of English:

The themes mailed to the Department in response to the request in Circular Letter No. 56 in regard to using two letters to grade composition work, one for mechanics and one for content, have been carefully studied and a report prepared giving an analysis of the relations existing between the two grades used in correcting the themes. A copy of this report is attached hereto for your consideration. Any comments or observations you wish to make in regard to the information contained in this report will be welcome.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) JUAN B. HUYKE,
Commissioner of Education.

VD:mb

REPORT ON THEMES SELECTED
FROM HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TO SHOW USE OF TWO
LETTERS IN GRADING COMPOSITION WORK

The themes mailed to the Department in response to the request in Circular Letter No. 56 in regard to using two letters to grade composition work, one for mechanics and one for content, were selected by the teachers as being representative of the distribution of work from the lowest to the highest mark. These themes have been tabulated in three groups and divided according to the year or class. The three groups are:

- 1) themes having the same grade in mechanics and in content,
- 2) themes having a poorer grade in mechanics than in content, and
- 3) themes having a better grade in mechanics than in content.

TABLE I

Distribution of Themes According to Relation
between Grade in Mechanics and Grade
in Content

Year	No. of themes having <u>same</u> grade in me- chanics and in content	No. of themes having <u>poorer</u> grade in me- chanics than in content	No. of themes having <u>better</u> grade in me- chanics than content	Total
I	32	57	18	107
II	30	46	20	95
III	33	40	12	85
IV	<u>25</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>68</u>
Total	119	180	56	355

TABLE II

Percentage based on Table I

Distribution of Themes According to Relation between
Grade in Mechanics and Grade in
Content

Year	Percentage of themes having <u>same</u> grade in mechanics and in content	Percentage of themes having <u>poorer</u> grade in mechanics than in content	Percentage of themes having <u>better</u> grade in mechanics than in content	Total
I	30	53	17	100
II	30	50	20	100
III	39	47	14	100
IV	37	54	9	100
Average	33	51	16	100

TABLE III

Distribution of Themes According to the Twenty-five
Possible Combination of Grades

					:	First Year										:
No. of themes					:	No. of themes having										:
having the <u>same</u>					:	<u>poorer</u> grade in me-										:
grade in mechanics					:	chanics than in										:
and content					:	content										:
					:											:
A	B	C	D	F	:	F	F	F	F	D	D	D	C	C	B	:
A	B	C	D	F	:	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	A	B	A	:
					:											:
13	14	3	2		:	1	7	6		6	11	16	10			:
																:
No. of themes having <u>better</u> grade																
in mechanics than in content																
						D	C	C	B	B	B	A	A	A	A	
						F	D	F	C	D	F	B	C	D	F	
						4	1	5	2			1	4	1		

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Second Year

No. of themes
having same
grade in me-
chanics and
content

No. of themes
having poorer
grade in mechan-
ics than in
content

A	B	C	D	F	:	F	F	F	F	D	D	D	C	C	B
A	B	C	D	F	:	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	A	B	A
3	15	9	2	1	:		3	4	4		4	5	8	10	8

No. of themes having better grade
in mechanics than in content

D	C	C	B	B	B	A	A	A	A
F	D	F	C	D	F	B	C	D	F
2	7		6	2	1	2			

Third Year

No. of themes
having same
grade in mechan-
ics and content

No. of themes
having poorer
grade in mechan-
ics than in content

A	B	C	D	F	:	F	F	F	F	D	D	D	C	C	B
A	B	C	D	F	:	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	A	B	A
8	10	9	3	3	:	1	1	2	5		2	10	2	9	8

No. of themes having better grade
in mechanics than in content

D	C	C	B	B	B	A	A	A	A
F	D	F	C	D	F	B	C	D	F
	2	1	5	2	2				

Fourth Year

No. of themes having <u>same</u> grade in mechan- ics and content					:	No. of themes having <u>poorer</u> grade in me- <u>chanics</u> than in content										:
A	B	C	D	F	:	F	F	F	F	D	D	D	C	C	B	:
A	B	C	D	F	:	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	A	B	A	:
5	8	9	3		:	1	1	2	2	2	2	6	4	9	8	:

No. of themes having better
grade in mechanics than in content

D	C	C	B	B	B	A	A	A	A
F	D	F	C	D	F	B	C	D	F
1			1			3	1		

Comment on Tables

Tables I and II

The averages at the end of Table II show that

- 1) one-third of the themes have the same grade in mechanics and in content
- 2) one-half of the themes have a poorer grade in mechanics than in content
- 3) one-sixth of the themes have a better grade in mechanics than in content

It is interesting to note in Table II, in the column giving the percentage of themes having the same grade in mechanics and in content that the percent advances from 30 in the freshman year to 37 in the senior year. There are two possible explanations of this increase: either

- 1) our educative process has succeeded in turning out a greater percentage of students who have their ability to use the language developed to a degree equal to their power in selecting and organizing ideas, or
- 2) of the students who have left school during the preceding three years there has been eliminated such a number of these students who are deficient in the use of language as to result in a corresponding increase in the percentage of those of higher ability in the use of the language.

In the column of percentages of themes having better grade in mechanics than in content, the senior year shows the lowest percentage.

Table III

A study of Table III shows that of the twenty-five possible combinations of grades resulting from the use of two letters for grading, all combinations have been used except one, the A in mechanics and F in content grade, which, of course, would be used only under very extraordinary circumstances. As the themes selected for this study are representative of the work being done, the fact that 24 combinations were used demonstrates the value of the use of two letters in grading.

Another interesting point is seen in the distribution of the F grade in mechanics:

- 1) in the first year-of 16 papers receiving F in mechanics only two receive F in content, while 14 receive A, C, or D in content
- 2) in the second year-of 12 papers receiving F in mechanics only one receives an F in content, while 11 receive B, C, or D in content
- 3) in the third year-of 12 papers receiving F in mechanics only three receive F in content, while nine receive A, B, C, or D in content
- 4) in the fourth year of the four papers receiving F in mechanics none receive F in content

From this one may perhaps conclude that most of the students who receive a failing mark do so not because of their lack of ability to select and organize ideas but because of their poor use of the language. What can be done to get students to put forth greater effort to acquire a mastery of the language? Students who are not writing as well as we feel justified in expecting in view of the thought content of their themes are a constant problem; teachers feel that such students should pass and yet their written work does not seem to justify it.

When promotions are considered, teachers find especially difficult the problem of placing those students who are making F in mechanics and D in content of their work. Shall those two marks be averaged? If such a student is making F in mechanics is it safe to promote him? He has actually passed on the content of the themes, although, of course, with a low mark.

Another puzzling case is that of the student who arrives at the end of the term making F in mechanics and B or C in content. Why has he not brought the mechanics grade up to at least a D? Such questions on investigation yield many interesting results.

The information that is to be found from a study of the chart is much more extensive than that attempted by these few notes. What has been given here is simply suggestive of some of the conclusions that may be reached or of some of the questions that are raised by the data. The charts tell their own story and will no doubt stimulate many interesting interpretations.

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